THE SPECIAL VALUE OF THE FRICK GIFT

A Wise Method in the Public Disposal of Private Collections

By Royal Cortissoz

It is high tide in the local galleries. There are exhibitions open almost without number, and more are to be reckoned with in the immediate future. The Winter Academy is due on the 13th, and the French show at the Metropolitan comes two days later. In the sales rooms, where there already has been considerable activity, some of the most important events of the season are soon to be expected. Next month the collection of the late Thatcher M. Adams will be dispersed, under the auspices of the American Art Association. It contains notable works of the eighteenth century English school, portraits by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Romney, Raeburn and Lawrence. These are accompanied by a group of Dutch masters, headed by a fine example of Nicholas Maes. In conjunction with the Adams sale there will be disposed of, also, a number of old and modern pictures from other collections, among them some examples of the French Impressionists and various Barbizon and other paintings left by the late Harris B. Dick.

A Noble Landmark In Our Art History

Comment upon Mr. Frick's gift of his collection to the public is naturally enough concentrated just now upon the mere magnitude of his bequest. He leaves to the city, or to the state, as the exact terms of his will may determine, a prodigious body of artistic treasure. It is said that it cost him from $30,000,000 to $40,000,000, and the estimate seems reasonable. Yet it is in the particular disposition of his works of art that he has done most to place his countrymen in his debt. For a number of years, when our great private collections have not gone to the auction rooms, they have gravitated to public museums. Nothing could be more commendable—save the newer policy which has given a Johnson Museum to Philadelphia, a Freer Museum to Washington, and now a Frick Museum to New York. The independent gathering of masterpieces, isolated in a building of their own, is a boon for which we are always bound to be grateful, and it takes on a peculiarly rare atmosphere when it reduces to a minimum the institutional character inseparable from the public museum. The Frick collection will inevitably be compared with the Wallace collection in London. But when the reader is making comparisons of this sort let him think of another, smaller shrine of art; instead of Hertford House, let him think of the Poldi-Pezzoli, at Milan. There is the ideal precedent, which Mr. Frick has followed.

In giving his house along with his pictures and other beautiful possessions he has done all that a collector could do to send a Velasquez or a Rembrandt or a Gainsborough down to posterity, not as a "museum specimen," but as a human thing, a work made truly for the delight of mankind. We would be lost without museums. But we are trebly enriched when the museum idea is camouflaged, so to say, by the atmosphere of an individual's home. It is an interesting coincidence that, at a time when the historic interiors of Europe and Great Britain are being broken up as never before, the announcement of the Frick bequest should be made. The old order changeth, giving place to the new. Is the ancient tradition to be revived in the United States, ancestral collections being scattered abroad only to enter upon a more permanent form of existenceon this side of the Atlantic? It requires no great stretching of the imagination to recognize in Mr. Frick's gift the establishment of something like a landmark in our art history.

His place as a collector is the more easily and the more accurately fixed as it is considered with reference to the conditions of his time and those which preceded him. Earlier in the last fifty years, when the more important American collections were being made, responsibility for them was chargeable more often to the dealer than to the connoisseur. And the dealer was sometimes well qualified to bear the burden. The late Samuel P. Avery, whose advice counted heavily in the formation of the W. H. Vanderbilt collection, and the late Daniel Cotter, whose taste reacted upon the decoration of many homes, were both men of advanced ideas and culture. They were indispensable in the introduction of the Barbizon school into this country. M. Durand-Ruel performed as useful a service in respect to the French Impressionists. It was in the collecting of old masters that the first of our leading private collectors arose, Henry G. Marquand in New York and John G. Johnson, in Philadelphia. But in their golden days, as in those of the dealers aforementioned, the market was restricted. An old master like Rembrandt's "Gilder," brought to this country by the late William Schaus and brought by the late H. O. Havemeyer, was a positively sensational rarity. Unique gems, at portentous prices, were almost never to be had, and when they turned up there was hardly anybody prepared to buy them. Then, with the advent of "big business," came a change.

Americans with bottomless purses entered the field and galleries abroad that had previously seemed impregnable began to open their doors, first very quietly and unobtrusively, always discreetly, and by and by with eagerness. It was in this epoch, a matter of the last ten or fifteen years, that Mr. Frick became active. He belonged, as a collector, to the group that consisted of Morgan, Altman, Widener and Elkins. In their interests the dealer assumed a rôle very different from that of Avery, paying a few thousands for a picture by Millet, or Cottier negotiating as modestly for a Monticelli or an Alfred Stevens. The dealers of this later dispensation "marked down" some renowned masterpiece in Europe as a hunter marks down his quarry, choosing the kind of painting that the ubiquitous Baedeker used to distinguish with a double star. When he got it he sold it to one of the little group of millionaires just cited.

People sometimes wonder if a millionaire thus worked for is well served. As well wonder if a banker with Crœsus for a client always brings before him the best investments. What other kind would he dream of recommending? Mr. Johnson once repeated to the present writer a remark made to him by Mr. Altman, who was talking about a masterpiece offered to him. "Of course I know," he wailed, "that they will ask me an unreasonable sum for this picture. But I suppose I'll pay. I've got to have it." In this, Mr. Johnson added, his friend was unquestionably following the right course. There was only one thing to do when you had started out to form a gallery of tremendous masterpieces. That was to pay whatever they cost. The gallery would justify itself. Sometimes the logic of this coldly practical hypothesis woud be dislocated by sheer human idiosyncrasy. We recall the story of a famous Ver Meer in the hands of a New York dealer. He showed it quite casually one morning to Collector A. Later that day he had a visit from Collector B., who liked the picture and might have bought it save for one insuperable flaw in the situation. Collector A. had seen it first. That "took the bloom off." Collector B. didn't want it. Anecdotes of Mr. Frick's career as a collector are few, but all that is known of him is testimony to the fact that he had nothing of this petty narrowness. If there is one trait that emerges from his record it is a certain large, couageous mode of grappling with the picture market. Regardless of expense, he sent his dealers after big prizes, and got them.

He showed his courage in more ways than one. The Frick collection is rich in the type of celebrated painting which the connoisseur and the layman alike would identify as wisely acquired, paintings like Rembrandt's "Polish Rider" and his portrait of himself, from Lord Rochester's collection; paintings like Gainsborough's "The Mall," and his full length of "Mrs Bowater"; paintings like the three Ver Meers, the portraits by Titian, Velasquez and Van Dyck, and the set of Fragonard decorations which Mr. Morgan previously owned. But these do not tell the whole story. One of the most precious of Mr. Frick's pictures is an early Italian work which one would have expected to find in the Johnson collection rather than in his, the beautiful "St. Francis in the Desert," by Giovanni Bellini. If Mr. Frick cared to buy the "Mrs. Bowater," of Gainsborough, which might be said to illustrate one of the supreme conventions of court portraiture, he cared also to buy El Greco's "Vincentio Anastagi," which is its antithesis. Visitors to the Metropolitan will recall Mr. Frick's "Pieta," lent to that institution as an Antonello da Messina, but ascribed by M. Hulin to a French Primitive of the school of Provence. Whatever its origin, it offers striking proof of Mr. Frick's interest in pictures utterly removed from that glamour which hangs about the spectacular performances of the recognized kings of art. He was an eclectic if ever there was one. His collection ranges from the austerity of Holbein's "Thomas Cromwell" to the light, eighteenth century elegance of Houdon's busts of the Countess de Cayla and the Countess de Jaucourt, from the rugged power of Rembrandt to the delicate artifice of Whistler. Renaissance bronzes and Oriental porcelains fill out the picture he created. When the world sees it, some day, tribute will be paid not only to his generosity, but to the breadth of view which characterized his proceedings as a collector.

VINCENTIO ANASTAGI
(From the painting by El Greco in the Frick collection)

Well Painted Pictures of the War

At the Anderson galleries there opened yesterday, for the benefit of the Navy Club, a notable exhibition of war pictures by M. J. F. Bouchor, one of the artists commissioned by the French government to paint at the front. It is in some ways the most satisfactory affair of the kind that has thus far been presented to the American public. There is, to begin with, the matter of scale. Some artists have gone to work on the hypothesis that because the war lasted four years every picture of it must be about four years high. They have thought that by painting huge canvases they could achieve the grand style. M. Bouchor has painted, on panels, small studies of types and scenes. In their unassuming, natural approach to the subject they win immediate sympathy. As regards style, he is equally discreet. Mr. Nevinson, to name but a single example of the "advanced" school, has experimented on the field of battle with new artistic theories. The result is that the observer of his work thinks more of the theories than of the war. M. Bouchor is content to state the facts in a readily comprehensible manner. The result in his case is what we take to be historical truth.

There are numerous paintings in his show, about two hundred in all. They embody impressions of the armies in Alsace and on the Somme, episodes on the Belgian and Italian fronts, and a particularly exhaustive survey of things at Verdun. The armies of all the Allies are commemorated, with admirably crisp portraits of their leaders, and, best of all, the varied forces here portrayed are sketched with a touch revealing their peculiar national traits. By some lucky stroke of insight M. Bouchor makes himself the acceptable interpreter not only of the French soldier, but of the American, too. His paintings of our colored troops are among the best that have been made. Details of equipment he takes in his stride. The essential aim of his work lies in the subtler domain of carriage and demeanor. In drawing and brush work he is a neat, concise craftsman. He reats both the figure and its background with delightful skill. His architecture deserves by itself a word of praise. Witness the charming studies of Amiens Cathedral, or the picture of "Verdun From the Quay of the Meuse" (No. 167). There is a drama here and there in this exhibition, but the pictures tell us, on the whole, nothing of fighting, emphasis being placed rather on the traits of the men who did the work and the general scene of war. The show remains on view until the 20th. No one who cares for the subject can afford to miss it.

Three Etchers of The Present Day

Some years have passed since Mr. Frank W. Benson first surprised and pleased the admirers he had won by his accomplished painting by showing them that he could also etch a good plate. In successive seasons, as a few new prints of his have appeared, they have confirmed the impression he originally conveyed. Now at the Kennedy gallery he again presents a collection of his etchings and dry-points, adding as usual several new pieces, and once more his triumph is complete. It is complete, that is, as regards the studies of wild fowl which predominate. His figure work is distinctly uneven. Only a scant handful of his ventures in this direction, the lovely "Nan," and the equally lovely "Head" (No. 13), are really worthy of him. But the duck shooting subjects are superb. One does not need to be a sportsman to appreciate these beautifully drawn designs, so full of life, movement, charm. On rare occasions they have a decidedly decorative character, suggesting that the artist has had some contact with the Japanese color print. The amusing "Herons in a Pine Tree" offer a case in point. More often the sentiment of Mr. Benson's work is purely the sentiment of nature. It is work that wears well, increasing in interest as it comes from time to time into view. We know of no one save Bracquemond who has delineated the fowls of the air and shore so well, and Bracquemond never had anything like Mr. Benson's freshness and variety.

When the Scandinavian exhibition was held at the American Art Galleries in 1912 and Mr. Edvard Munch, among others, was introduced here, we wondered why in the world he used such dull tone, and why he achieved absolutely nothing in line, in composition, in color, that was in the slightest degree distinguished. It seemed then that what troubled Mr. Munch, as it troubled so many of his countrymen, was simply an indurated coarseness of grain in the very body and soul of Scandinavian art. The collection of his lithographs, etchings and woodcuts which may now be seen at the Bourgeois gallery leaves this judgment unmodified. Mr. Munch is a type of decadence in the substance of his art. The morbidity of his themes could easily be overlooked if it were balanced by æsthetic beauty. But, like so many Northern artists of the kind made familiar by the exhibitions of the Berlin and Munich "Secessionists," he is a heavy-handed draughtsman. There is no certitude about his line, which seems to fumble after form rather than to bring out its secrets with the firmness, the clarity, the simplicity and the quality of style which are necessary in the graphic arts. He has one outstanding merit, the vitality of a realist who sees life with sympathy and records it with a certain vigor. Unfortunately, for him, life needs to have something superadded to it if it is to give lasting value to a work of art; it needs style and beauty. Neither of these do we find in Mr. Munch's prints. In only one out of the three-score, in the lithograph of "Eva Cudocci and Bella Edwards," does the crude talent which he seems to possess produce a really beguiling effect.

In two of the smaller rooms at the Knoedler gallery there have been hung about a hundred of the etchings and dry-points of Muirhead Bone. His clean, almost bleak draughtsmanship is a joy to see. It is most obviously victorious in his studies of architecture. There are a few impressions of building operations in which Mr. Bone uses the skill of the virtuoso, extorting a kind of linear poetry out of mere piled up scaffolding. He can work a little miracle with the edge of a plank. But we have heard too much of him, on occasion, as the artist of the tour de force. His best work has been done in landscape. There, though he lacks Cameron's romantic warmth, his restrained picturesqueness is if anything more distinguished, and his line is purer, stronger. He reminds us of that saying of Whistler's, which can never be too often repeated: "The artist is known by what he omits." The defect of his quality is a disposition to turn austerity into dryness. He is sometimes Rembrandtesque in his precise definition of ground forms, but he lacks Rembrandt's breadth. It is something, however, to have got into one's work a hint that savors of the Dutch master.

Upstairs, at the Knoedler gallery, there is an exhibition of paintings in tempera, "Mexican in character," by Mr. Adolfo Best-Maugard. They are more Mexican than beautiful. Subjects more or less fantastic, treated in flat tints and in a style dimly suggestive of Eastern illuminations, give the show a mild exotic interest. In technique and especially in color these drawings are somewhat crude.

The Kraushaar gallery has moved to new quarters at 680 Fifth Avenue. To mark the transition an exhibition opens to-morrow of the etchings of Legros, three or four of his sombre landscapes being also shown. The familiar prints are welcome once more. The style of Legros is elevated. He knew his craft. Though academic discipline was at the bottom of his method, he etched with great personal force and imaginative fervor. The show has the significance of a tonic; in its keen, intellectual fashion it offers a protest against careless and self-willed workmanship.

The Passing of a Brilliant Painter

The death of Renoir, which has just been announced in Paris, is the death of an old man but a young painter. He was young, at the age of seventy-eight, by virtue of the intensity of enthusiasm which never left him. In the show of his works which was held at the Durand-Ruel gallery in this city last April there were some new paintings which had come only a few months before from his brush. If we are not mistaken, there were similar reminders of his phenomenal activity in a show of the preceding year. In them some commentators have been inclined to perceive evidences of sustained power. This view of the matter is, to tell the truth, rather more amiable than exact. Paralysis had necessarily enfeebled his touch. In color he had declined upon some wofully hot, unpleasant tones. But even in these doubtful souvenirs of his old age there smoldered the embers of a wonderful art.

He was, among the Impressionists, the great exemplar of sensuous beauty. In the treatment of the nude he had a positively Venetian amplitude and glow. Whether he painted the landscape or the figure, he was rich, sumptuous, as lavish of color as of light. The big canvas by him in the Metropolitan, the "Mme. Charpentier and Her Children," is "important" as such things go, but it does not by any means explain his fame. It is not glowing enough, not vibrant enough. Renoir at his best was a glorious interpreter of the visible world, a painter in whose canvases the joy of life is consummately expressed. Now that he is dead there will be much talk about his rank. In some quarters he is regarded as a greater man than either Manet or Monet. Such pigeonholings are futile. They all worked together for the furtherance of a fructifying movement. Each survives, on his own account, because he knew how to paint. That is Renoir's best epitaph.

Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions

We note with appreciation the appearance of "Applied Art," a portfolio published by Mr. F. K. Ferenz. It is edited by Mr. Herbert E. Martini, who has been assisted in the preparation of the text by four other gentlemen. Mr. Heyworth Campbell writes on art as it

Continued on page thirteen